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ECONOMIC GROWTH

Afghanistan International Marble Conference
Connects Producers and Investors: From April 1216, USAID and the Afghanistan Chamber of
Commerce and Industry (ACCI) hosted the second
Afghanistan International Marble Conference in Hirat.
The fair brought together more than 300 sector
stakeholders to highlight the country's wealth of
marble, address industry challenges, and learn about
new techniques and equipment. Minister of Mines
Wahidullah Shahrani, Governor of Hirat Ahmad Yusuf
Nuristani, and U.S. Ambassador Karl W. Eikenberry
delivered remarks at the conference launch. U.S.
Deputy Secretary of State Jacob Lew presented the



Representatives from Arcan Stone exhibit some of their products at the conference. PHOTO: USAID/Afghanistan

first Superior Achievement Award to Equity Capital Mining. The Ministry of Finance announced the removal of tariffs on all Afghanistan-processed marble, effective immediately.

Afghanistan's marble resources are vast, with the potential to drive the country's economic development. However, decades of conflict have left the Afghan marble industry underfinanced and underdeveloped, conditions that limit its profitability. Thus, the primary benefit of the conference was the opportunity it provided to link Afghan producers with international investors, partners, and donors. One example is that the Ministry of Mines and the Embassy of Italy announced approval of \$40 million for construction and improvements on the road from Hirat to Behsod. Another link example is that the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, American investors, and Afghan partners agreed to provide access to credit ranging from \$100,000 to \$250 million as long-term loans for businesses. A third link is that Afghan Growth Finance agreed to provide access to financing for businesses ranging from \$50,000 to \$10 million with interest rates set between nine and 17 percent.



Students at Zarghona Ana Middle School in Kandahar receive OLPC laptops.
PHOTO: USAID/ASMED

One Laptop per Child Program Distributes
Computers in Kandahar: As part of the One Laptop
Per Child (OLPC) Afghanistan initiative, USAID and
the Afghan Ministry of Education distributed 200
laptops to 120 girls and 80 boys at Zarghona Ana
Middle School in Kandahar City. With the laptops,
students and their families can access word
processing, the internet, job information, and
resources for small business and farm
development. OLPC is a joint effort between the
Afghan Government, USAID, Roshan Telecom, and
Paiwastoon Networking Services Ltd. USAID's

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Afghanistan Small and Medium Enterprise Development (ASMED) project provides financial, logistical, and communications support.

Jalalabad Carpet Traders Move into New Bazaar:

During the years of war and instability in Afghanistan, many carpet weavers and traders relocated to Pakistan. Now, USAID's ASMED project is helping these carpet weavers and traders move their businesses back to Afghanistan. Through a grant to the Eastern Region Carpet Exporter Guild, ASMED provided financial support for transportation costs, temporary storage, and the refurbishment of a new Jalalabad Carpet Bazaar to ease the carpet producers' transition. As an additional incentive to move to Jalalabad, ASMED will provide the guild office with furniture, transportation, a comprehensive business-to-business website, business management and advisory services, and international marketing support.



Carpet traders examine goods at the opening of the Jalalabad Carpet Bazaar.

PHOTO: USAID/ASMED

The new bazaar celebrated its grand opening on March 25. The Governor and Deputy Governor of Nangarhar Province; Deputy Minister of Commerce; head of the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry; and representatives from the Export Promotion Agency of Afghanistan, parliament, the provincial council, and the Carpet Exporter Guild attended the opening event. The bazaar, a modern, secure, and centrally located market, exclusively devoted to the sale of Afghan carpets with room for 180 small and medium businesses, should greatly increase sales throughout the area.

The Afghan Artist and Artisan Exhibition in Hirat led to sales of more than \$60,000. PHOTO: USAID/ASMED

USAID Sponsors Artisan Fair to Celebrate International Women's Day: The New Community Development Organization (NCDO), with financial support from USAID, recently hosted a four-day Afghan Artist and Artisan Exhibition in Hirat in coordination with the Directorate of Women's Affairs. The fair, as part of the official celebrations to mark International Women's Day, provided high-profile retail space for 62 exhibitors. Most of the participating businesses were female-owned or female production oriented small and medium enterprises.

The event was a rousing success, with total sales of more than \$60,000. The exhibitors' profit margin was significant enough that the NCDO was

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able to demonstrate how the business owners can self-finance similar events and still turn a profit. The networking element of the event also had a particularly significant impact, as a number of interested traders came to make new market linkages. The Dorkhshan Women Carpets Association from Badghis Province, for example, made eight separate agreements to begin shipping goods to Hirat-based traders. Pre-orders for their carpets are in excess of \$18,000, which is significantly more than their current annual sales.

Afghan Journalists Hone Their Trade and Business Reporting Skills: A corps of journalists well informed about economics and trade issues is essential for accurate reporting and an open press. To improve the quality of business journalism in Afghanistan, USAID recently supported a workshop about reporting on critical trade issues for nine journalists. Media advisor Naomi Goldsmith worked with the Afghan journalists for five days, facilitating the workshop's classroom and field activities, and mentoring the journalists' work.



Journalists practice interview techniques with a trader at the Kabul Customs House.

PHOTO: USAID/TAFA

As part of the training, USAID's Trade and Accession Facilitation for Afghanistan (TAFA) project arranged a

trip to the Kabul Customs House, where participants observed trucks arriving from Pakistan, toured the warehouse where goods are inspected, and learned about the laboratory where goods are verified and the offices where the products are classified in a newly automated system. The journalists had the opportunity to speak to traders and Customs House staff about the challenges facing Afghanistan's import and export activities, and how TAFA's effort to address these issues will benefit the Afghan economy. At the end of the training, TAFA announced the establishment of a press club to raise interest and understanding of trade issues and reporting, thereby building on the knowledge and goodwill created during the workshop.

STABILIZATION

USAID Participates in Badghis Peace Jirga: A recent peace jirga in Qadis District of Badghis Province has reaffirmed the close working relationship between USAID's Local Governance and Community Development (LGCD) program and the Qadis District Governor, host of the jirga. While the warm spring weather increases the mobility of anti-government elements and the number of attacks across the country, Afghan government officials and security forces joined with local communities and invited international stakeholders to rally in support of peace and governance efforts. The District Governor, provincial government officials, and several international agency representatives, including representatives from USAID, joined an estimated 1,000 local residents at the April 22

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gathering. Speakers emphasized the importance of inter-ethnic unity and cooperation to bring peace to the district, including those portions still controlled by insurgents.

At the event, USAID engaged the youth of Langar Village, who will soon benefit from LGCD infrastructure projects. The projects will employ young men to rehabilitate more than eight kilometers of roads, a quarter kilometer of canals, and 11 culverts. At the jirga, USAID also further strengthened its relationship with the community development committee heads from Buzbay and Khajah, with whom LGCD is coordinating to implement community stabilization grant projects. The



Qadis residents, Afghan officials, and USAID representatives attended the peace jirga.

PHOTO: USAID/LGCD

Qadis District Governor thanked USAID for its assistance and confirmed the importance of the LGCD program for the district. When the Afghan Government, community members, and the international community work together, development efforts advance and the influence of the insurgency decreases.



Refugee families receive hygiene kits.
PHOTO: USAID/LGCD

Afghan Government Delivers Hygiene Kits to Displaced Families in Kunar: The government of Kunar Province, with support from USAID's LGCD program, recently distributed 630 hygiene kits to displaced families that had moved into the Sholtan Valley following fighting in Pakistan's Bajaur Agency. The distribution took place despite a number of significant security incidents in the area, including a nighttime attack on the District Center. Despite the danger, the Afghan Government and the community continued to support the project, with numerous Afghan officials engaged in the process.

On the second day of the distribution, a delegation from the provincial council distributed some of the kits to the refugee families. LGCD also hired ten laborers to help young orphan refugees and female-headed households in unloading and carrying kits. The District Governor appointed a committee to support this initiative, specifically verifying beneficiaries, ensuring security at distributions, observing the transparency of the process, and using the opportunity to engage with residents in the unstable Sholtan Valley.

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Goals: In late April, LGCD delivered construction materials to community laborers working on a 336meter road in Sange-e-Masha Village. The village is home to small businesses and families dependent on agriculture as the main source of food and income. Due to the district's terrain, harsh winters, and relatively remote location, this road, connecting the

Road in Ghazni Furthers USAID Stabilization

disrepair. This disrupts farmers' ability to transport undamaged produce and goods to market quickly. The new road will ease the time and cost of transportation to market, enabling farmers to increase their net incomes. It will also provide better access to health clinics and schools.

village with the district bazaar, is in a state of severe



Men from Sange-e-Masha Village inspect materials for repair of a main access road. PHOTO: USAID/LGCD

USAID's Food Insecurity Response in Urban Populations program is mobilizing laborers from the community to complete the work, and LGCD purchased the needed tools and materials. This sharing of resources will maximize USAID's stabilization efforts in the district. The project also provides an immediate source of work and income for the local population, reminding villagers of the Afghan Government's commitment to development.



A grant from the Ambassador's Small Grants Program allowed a local association in Char Bolak to purchase ten cows and run a livestock program for vulnerable women.

PHOTO: USAID/ASGP

CROSS-CUTTING

Ambassador's Small Grants Program Brings Literacy and Livestock to Women in Char Bolak: Most women in remote Char Bolak District located in

Balkh Province are illiterate and live in poverty. Rahima and her husband Haji Shahzada were determined to improve the quality of life of the area's women through their newly established Char Bolak Women Development and Animal Husbandry Association. Hearing about the U.S. Ambassador's Small Grants Program for Gender Equality in Afghanistan, Rahima developed a project to purchase ten cows for vulnerable women in the village, as well as to improve the association's facilities.

As a result of the grant, the association has experienced tremendous growth and has been able to reach out to many local women. The association now has 150 members, 20 of whom are involved in livestock training and a substantial majority of whom receives literacy training. Now that the women have the skills and opportunity to earn an income and

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improve their families' diets, their lives are changing for the better. "For the first time, Char Bolak witnesses the implementation of such a dynamic project that attracts an increasing number of women," Rahima reports proudly.



Midwives graduate in Hirat. PHOTO: USAID/Afghanistan

HEALTH

Midwives Graduate from Hirat Institute of Health Sciences: Forty new midwives graduated from the Hirat Institute of Health Sciences, ready to provide improved care to mothers and infants in their home communities, on April 21. Midwives are essential to improving healthcare in Afghanistan, as the country currently has the second highest maternal mortality rate in the world. About every 30 minutes a mother dies giving birth in Afghanistan, and 77 percent of these deaths are due to factors that could be avoided with proper health care. The neonatal mortality rate is also high in Afghanistan, with 60 newborns out of

every 1,000 dying in the first month of life. The 40 newly minted midwives will do their part to ensure that expecting mothers receive necessary prenatal care and assistance during delivery.

Ambassador E. Anthony Wayne, the U.S. Embassy Coordinating Director for Development and Economic Affairs, and Dr. Suraya Dalil, the Acting Minister of Public Health, joined Hirat Governor Yusuf Nuristani, regional Afghan health officials, and members of the international donor community in congratulating the graduates. "It takes two years of intense training to provide these women with the knowledge and skills needed to become midwives, and I thank them for committing to the important role of serving mothers and newborns in Afghanistan," Ambassador Wayne said in his remarks. "By setting this high standard for accreditation, the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) has shown commitment to the goal of professional care for Afghanistan's women and children. We will continue our support to Afghan families in this important area."

This U.S.-funded Health Services Support Program is collaborating with the ministry to support ten midwifery schools throughout Afghanistan and increase the number of skilled midwives in an effort to reduce infant and maternal mortality. With multi-donor support and high-level commitment from the MoPH, the number of midwives in Afghanistan has increased from 467 in 2002 to 2,200 in 2009. USAID has helped train more than 1,400 midwives and developed the midwifery education program utilized by 34 midwifery schools in 32 provinces.

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Improving Disease Outbreak Monitoring: To bring disease surveillance systems to the next level, both local and international public health officials must take advantage of advances in information technology. On April 12, World Health Organization (WHO) and Afghan MoPH personnel completed their first comprehensive training on geographical information systems (GIS). Disease Early Warning System Afghanistan and its partners (WHO, USAID, and UNFPA) initiated the process of training public health professionals in the field with the goal of improving disease surveillance in the country.



Afghan public health professionals learn to use new tools, such as GIS, to improve disease surveillance.

PHOTO: USAID/DEWS

"This training is a stepping stone to building future capacity of our public health managers and surveillance units at the regional level," said WHO representative for Afghanistan Peter Graaff. "This is the first GIS training program launched in Afghanistan for public health experts and data managers. Today, WHO and the Economic and Social Research Institute International will certify 15 training participants. These participants are public health experts and data managers representing all regions of Afghanistan."

The training will be followed by establishing GIS units in all regions of Afghanistan and at the national level. This training course will be offered yearly for entry-level public health professionals and data managers, and four refresher trainings per year are scheduled for those who completed the first course. Using mapping software to track disease outbreaks and other public health issues of concern will improve healthcare delivery for the people of Afghanistan.